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ABSTRACT

Three articles on civic education are included in this theme issue. "Civic Education: While Democracy Flourishes Abroad, U.S. Schools Try to Reinvigorate Teaching of Citizenship," provides an overview of the status of civic education in the United States. "Civic Education: Schools Aim to Link Knowledge, Active Lessons in Citizenship" features efforts undertaken by specific schools and institutions to develop citizenship education programs. "Schools Seek to Give Students a Taste of Voting" examines a project in Arizona in which some 80,000 students accompanied their parents to the polls and cast mock ballots in an effort to educate the students about voting and to instill in them the habit of lifelong voting. A list of references is included as well as a resource list of some of the many programs attempting to boost civic education. (DB)

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CIVIC EDUCATION

Curriculum Update

January 1991

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ASCD CURRICULUM Update

January 1991

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1250 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1403
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Civic Education:

While Democracy Flourishes Abroad, U.S. Schools Try to Reinvigorate Teaching of Citizenship

By John O'Neil

As the seeds of democracy begin to take root around the globe, most notably in Eastern Europe, there is growing concern that students in the United States leave school with neither sufficient knowledge about nor the inclination to act upon the rights and duties of responsible citizenship here at home. "It is a crisis and a scandal," says John Buchanan, a former U.S. congressman from Alabama who now serves as president of the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship (CAC) and chairman of People for the American Way (PAW). "At a time when we celebrate the bicentennial of our rich political heritage, we find little knowledge [among students] of the content of the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. And at a time when the whole world is in ferment in a movement for democracy, we've got record levels of apathy" in the U.S. toward the everyday workings of democracy. Concludes Richard Remy,

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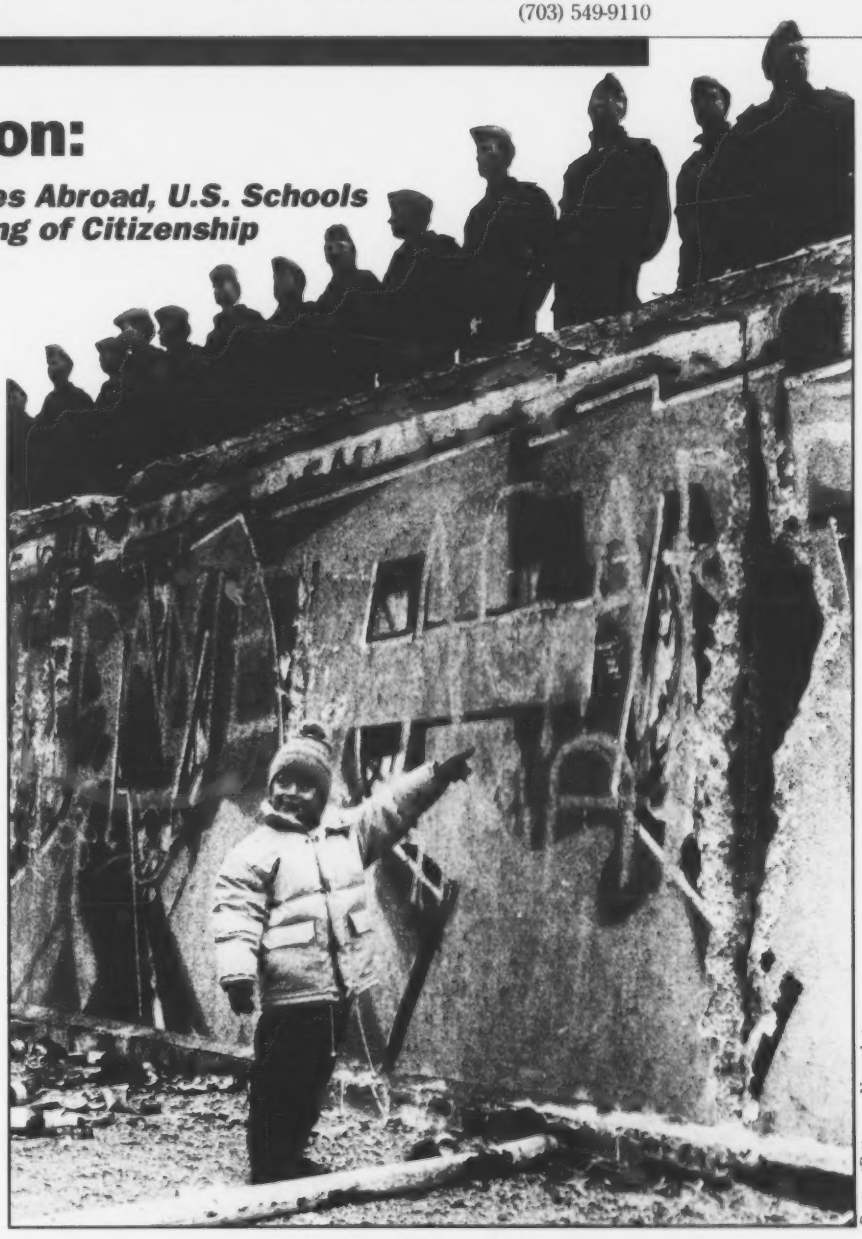

Reuters/Bettmann Newsphotos

The dismantling of the Berlin Wall has come to symbolize an international appetite for democracy. Many Americans, however, have become complacent about the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship, some experts contend.

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Civic Education:

Schools Aim to Link Knowledge, Active Lessons in Citizenship

What started four years ago in Nick Byrne's 5th grade classroom as a lesson on the First Amendment has evolved into a student-led effort to amend the U.S. Constitution.

Byrne, who teaches at Tenakill Elementary School in Closter, N.J., was teaching about the First Amendment and wanted to help students understand how it applied in their lives. So he sent them home with a weekend assignment to clip newspapers and search for public issues that caught their interest. As fate would have it, the weekend papers were full of stories on the environment and the problems of pollution and waste, and the class unanimously adopted the issue.

Beginning with a letter-writing campaign to government officials and the media, students quickly came to realize that their letters would yield only modest results, says Byrne. So they formed a club called "Kids Against Pollution"—which proceeded to grow into an international network of some 900 students, teachers, and parents seeking a saner approach to environmental waste. For their efforts, they've racked up an array of awards and been named by *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the "thousand points of light." One of their latest efforts is to offer a pro-environment amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., from New Jersey has agreed to sponsor the plan.

Along the way, says Byrne, the students have learned a variety of important (and sophisticated) lessons about how public issues are debated and decided. And although the group's efforts have included boycotts against merchants using polystyrene containers (believed to be environmentally harmful), Byrne says students have also learned that public debates are often won by gathering information and negotiating behind the scenes, not necessarily by the adversarial tactics that attract media interest. "The kids now feel that they have the power to make change through their knowledge, not with super-confrontation," he says.

In classrooms like Byrne's across the U.S., teachers are struggling to address the age-old goal of preparing students to be participating citizens in a democracy. In the face of declining voter turnouts, apathy toward public issues, and other signs of an uninterested populace, many feel the time is ripe for citizenship education to re-emerge as a guiding force for schools.

"For years public schools have issued broad statements of their intention to educate for responsible democratic citizenship," says a draft version of CIVITAS, a civic education framework being developed by the Center for Civic Education (CCE) and the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship (CAC), expected to be published this spring. "However sincere these statements may have been, systematic programs to educate for civic participation have yet to appear, and no more than a few students ever emerge from schools with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to monitor and influence the public policies that affect their communities, the nation, and the world community."

A New 'Dark Age'

Failure to provide effective civic education programs could eventually help to take public decisions out of the hands of many and place them in the hands of a few, warns Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. "Unless we find better ways to educate ourselves as *citizens*, America runs the risk of drifting unwittingly into a new kind of dark age," Boyer wrote in the November 1990 *Educational Leadership*, "a time when specialists control the decision-making process and citizens will be forced to make critical decisions, not on the basis of what they know, but on the basis of blind belief in so-called 'experts.'"

At the heart of the CIVITAS project (for which Boyer serves as chair of its national review council) is an effort to build student competence in three

Center for Civic Education

Civic learning comes not only from textbooks, but from active learning experiences. Here, a high school student testifies at a simulated Congressional hearing as part of a curriculum developed by the Center for Civic Education.

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areas—civic knowledge and skills, civic participation, and civic virtue. Many observers feel there is convincing evidence of shortcomings in each of these areas.

Reports by the National Assessment of Educational Progress in civics have revealed some troubling gaps in students' knowledge and skills. For example, although the vast majority of 12th graders tested in 1988 could display a rudimentary knowledge of civics, only 6 percent could evidence "broader and more detailed knowledge of the various institutions of government" (for example, Congress' power to override presidential vetoes) and a "more elaborated understanding" of a range of political processes (such as the role of primary elections and public opinion polls).

Further, relatively few schools have as a primary goal that students should learn the skills needed to participate effectively as citizens in a democracy. That lack has resulted, some believe, in young (and older) adults who don't see the functions that testifying at a town meeting, volunteering to help senior citizens, or casting a ballot in a public election have in ensuring the civic health of our democracy. Schools "don't really develop a realistic view of the political system and how students can have an impact on it," says Charles Quigley, CCE's executive director.

"The way civics has been organized over the years is essentially a descriptive view of public life—the lives of mayors, governors, the president, and so on," adds Joseph Julian, director of civic education at the Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. "Very little attention has been given to what the role of the citizen is in all of this." As a result, he says, students "are conditioned to think of citizens as being observers, not as policymakers."

Finally, the notion of civic virtue proposed by CIVITAS, some believe, addresses a vital concern not reflected enough in school curriculums or society at large. Richard Remy, associate director of the Mershon Center at Ohio State University, says

Close Up Foundation/R. Bouchard

Learning firsthand about politics, as in this program sponsored by the Close Up Foundation, is a basic part of civic education.

such problems as juvenile crime and high dropout rates can be traced back to—among other factors—a sense among young people that they are disconnected from the core values that characterize community. "Many of our young people lack a sense of civic responsibility, a sense of a commitment to basic core values that we hold important," he says.

Students need to be taught how to balance private with public good, and they need to learn—and care about—problems such as poverty and homelessness, Maxine Greene of Teachers College, Columbia University, told participants at a curriculum conference convened by ASCD last summer. "One of the most frightening things I see in schools ... is not giving a damn," she said. She cited the example of a teacher who took a group of students to a New York City grocery owned by a Korean merchant who was attempting to outlast a prolonged boycott over an alleged racial incident. "That, to me, is as important as lessons in the history of justice or of modern democracy," she said.

A Balanced Approach

Effective programs to prepare students for informed democratic participation must address students' civic knowledge, participation, and virtue simultaneously—a tricky balance that some believe is typically the exception rather than the rule. Many civics programs are grounded in the didactic teaching of governmental functions without giving students a chance to experience civic debate; others offer occasional chances for participation but don't ensure that students master the knowledge and skills required to inform that participation. The developers of CIVITAS argued over the ordering of the three organizers in the K–12 framework, but each part is essential to an effective, cohesive program, says Diane Eisenberg, former executive director of the CAC.

Supported by a $1-million grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, CIVITAS is the result of two years of work by a framework development committee, a teacher advisory committee, and a national review council (which includes ASCD Executive Director Gordon Cawelti). When published, it will provide a guide to curriculum developers and textbook publishers for planning civic education programs. "We hope that the state departments of education, especially, that are responsible for curriculum frameworks which have the most influence on textbook adoptions will be interested" in using CIVITAS, says Quigley.

Quigley compares CIVITAS to efforts of the American Bar Association to bring experts together, develop model penal codes, and make them available to various states and

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Close Up Foundation/James Pease

jurisdictions. CIVITAS, too, brought together experts from many fields to reach a consensus on the attributes of effective citizenship and how curriculums might be organized to help students become good citizens. Although the framework proposes scope and sequence, goals, and objectives for civic education, it is not a complete curriculum but instead should serve as a point of departure for curriculum deliberations, its developers assert. "This is not a national curriculum that's being inflicted on teachers," says Eisenberg.

Push for Participation

While experts agree that civics programs need to continue to emphasize knowledge and skills, much of the attention in the field is being directed toward expanding opportunities for student participation. "If the point were just to get students to mature into voters who watch television news diligently and pull a voting machine lever every few years, traditional civics courses would suffice," reasons Benjamin Barber, director of the Whitman Center for Culture and Politics at Rutgers University. "But if students are to become actively engaged in public forms of thinking and participate thoughtfully in the whole spectrum of civic activities, then civic education and social studies programs require a strong element of practical civil experience—real participation and empowerment."

In New York State, for example, schools have looked to a variety of sources to fulfill a new state requirement that all students take a one-semester "participation in government" course before graduation (usually during the senior year). The aim of the requirement is to bridge "the gulf between knowing the structures and functions of government and being able to participate within it as a citizen," says Kenneth Wade, chief of the state education department's social studies bureau. Students in some schools, he adds, are serving as interns in political campaigns and participating in community service projects, among other activities.

Syracuse University's Julian, who helped to develop a course to fulfill the New York graduation requirement, says students learn how to study issues and policies and then apply the methods they've learned to a local issue. "Students seem to enjoy the process of examining local issues because it gives them a sense that they're shaping the public discussion of those issues," he says. Materials developed at Syracuse are being used with 25,000 students statewide, he said.

Byrne, the Closter, N.J., teacher, stresses that involving students in participatory experiences requires that they learn the civic knowledge and skills they would likely be asked to learn in a traditional curriculum. After studying environmental issues firsthand, his pupils often "became more knowledgeable than the people they were talking to," he says.

Sense of Hopelessness

For a variety of reasons—ranging from changes in the ways public issues are debated to the realities of overcrowded and undersupported classrooms—many schools encounter difficulties in attempting to put into practice the ideas outlined in CIVITAS and other reports on civic education.

One important reason young people sometimes appear indifferent to democratic participation is the same one that adults cite: many Americans feel they can't make a difference. With the advent of PACs, innumerable "specialists" of every stripe, and misleading political campaigns, it's as difficult for students and teachers as for the public at large to make sense of complex public issues. "I think there's a feeling of hopelessness among young people, and also among adults, about their ability to make a difference in the democratic process," says Donna Fowler, issues director for People for the American Way.

Stephen Janger, president of the Close Up Foundation (a group that

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Schools Seek to Give Students a Taste of Voting

Last Election Day, many Arizona voters took more than their opinions to the polls—they took their kids. Or maybe it was the kids who took the parents.

As part of a statewide project dubbed "Kids Voting," the only one of its kind in the nation, some 80,000 students went with their parents to the polls, casting their ballots at special stations set up in each precinct. In preparation, their schools had designed activities for students of all ages, teaching students the rights and responsibilities of being informed voters and the mechanics of the election process. "Our intention is to create lifelong voters," says Marilyn Hawker, president and executive director of Kids Voting.

If it weren't for a chance encounter between three businessmen and a cab driver in Costa Rica, Kids Voting might not even exist. The businessmen—Robert Evans, Max Jennings, and Charles Walheim—went to Costa Rica several years ago on a fishing trip and wound up being tipped off by a local cab driver on the secret to Costa Rica's extraordinary voter turnout (at 80–90 percent, the highest of any democratic nation). One of the keys, he told the trio, is that children accompany their parents to the polls from an early age and cast their own special ballots at the polling place. Upon their return, the businessmen helped launch the Kids Voting program with a pilot project in the Phoenix area for the 1988 general election, and the program went statewide last fall.

Although numerous "mock elections" are held across the U.S. each Election Day, Kids Voting is the only program in which students study a voting-centered curriculum, register to participate, and vote at the same sites they would go to as adult voters, Hawker says. The program builds awareness among participating families about political issues, she says, and it's not uncommon to find students prepping their parents on some of the issues or candidates.

Alarming Indifference

Programs to help students learn and get excited about voting are desperately needed, experts contend. Of all the alarming signs regarding the civic participation of young people, perhaps none worries experts more than their failure to vote. The percentage of young adults who vote has declined steadily since 18-year-olds gained that right in 1972. Although some experts stress that choosing to vote is only one part of democratic participation, Donna Fowler, issues director for People for the American Way (PAW), wonders "how low we have to see the rates go before we get worried." PAW, a group based in Washington, D.C., recently commissioned a study to examine how young people feel about citizenship, participation, and social responsibility. According to the study of more than 1000 15- to 24-year-olds, only 12 percent believed that voting was an important part of citizenship.

Students who cast ballots in mock elections may be more likely to vote as adults.

Fowler says that schools can do several things to increase the likelihood that students will cast their ballots when they reach voting age, including teaching them the importance of voting and "making sure that every eligible high school senior is registered to vote." In Dade County, Fla., for example, the district has registered more than 95 percent of eligible students through a program in which students can sign up in their social studies classes.

In places like Arizona, the effort to boost students' interest in voting couldn't have come at a better time. Arizona has a poor track record on voter participation, ranking 42nd nationally in voter turnout for the 1988 presidential election. But proponents say the Kids Voting program has the potential to change that. In addition to sparking interest among would-be voters not yet of age, the program may help to draw registered voters to the polls: a study of the program's 1988 pilot project found a 3-percent boost in voter turnout in participating precincts. Hawker says Kids Voting is presently seeking sponsors, hoping to become a national project.

For more information, contact:

Kids Voting
604 W. McKellips Rd.
Mesa, AZ 85201
602/969-5046. ■

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promotes citizenship education programs) says last fall's national budget fiasco is a case study on how difficult it is to follow public policy issues, let alone participate more fully in them. "Politically, people went back and forth so often, with the White House changing its mind, and Republicans voting with Democrats, and Democrats voting with Republicans, that maybe only Congressional staff really knew what was going on," he says. "If I were an 18-year-old, I might walk away from the whole thing in disgust."

Moreover, involving students in debating issues such as U.S. involvement in the Persian Gulf or the relative merits of allowing a controversial group a public forum is considerably harder for teachers than giving a lecture or assigning material in a textbook, some experts say. James Leming of Southern Illinois University notes that teachers "are under incredible pressure to cover content." Opening up the classroom as a forum to have students debate controversial issues sometimes ends up taking a back seat. "Teachers I know have taken six months just to establish a climate" where informed debate can take place, he adds.

Others note that given the tendency for assessment to drive instruction, programs will continue to focus on basic content more than hands-on experiences in participation. "It's much more difficult to assess if a young person's got the [requisite] skills to engage in consensus building or conflict management to lobby the city council to build a playground at 4th and Green streets" than whether that student has mastered some isolated facts about civics, Remy observes.

Further, Remy questions whether schools, as opposed to other institutions, are even in a very good position to teach students about coalition-building or effective lobbying. It may be, he says, that schools should focus on cognitive skills and knowledge and allow students to learn participation skills in other ways—for example, through an internship or service project.

Finally, a revamped program for citizenship will encounter the daily realities facing teachers: overcrowded classes, lack of parental support, and students who may rarely read newspapers, or who come to school malnourished or abused, notes Fowler. "When teachers see that, the idea of teaching kids about voting, or about participation in the community, must seem ludicrous."

Sparking Change

Those involved with the development of CIVITAS, however, believe the framework can help spark change that will overcome some of these obstacles. Eisenberg says she expects CIVITAS will have "great ramifications for the way that civics will be taught" in the years ahead. And Quigley notes that until this project, "nothing had been done as rigorously or comprehensively" to provide teachers and curriculum developers with a clear description of what might be done to help students become better citizens. Adds John Buchanan, president of CAC: "What we hope to do is to help reform civic education throughout the society, using this resource as a platform from which to build."

Whatever the success of CIVITAS or other efforts to boost students' civic competence, global events are providing regular reminders of why democratic government requires better-informed and participating citizens. Jan Urban, a Czechoslovakian teacher who lost his job in 1977 as one of two teachers who refused to sign a government statement condemning a human rights group, spent the next 10 years employed as a stable hand, a forklift driver, a construction helper, and a bricklayer.

Fresh from his work organizing Civic Forum (a pro-democracy group) during the 1989 revolution in Prague, Urban last fall told participants at a conference sponsored by the U.S. Education Department that Americans must not forget that democracy functions only with the sustained involvement of its people. "That beautiful right given by democracy, the right not to care" can only be kept, paradoxically, through an informed, active citizenry, he said. ■

Nancy Bourke

Using newspapers in the classroom is a practical and effective way to help students prepare to debate the issues.

References

In addition to interviews, the author drew upon the following resources:

Anderson, Lee, et al. (1990). *The Civics Report Card.* Princeton, N.J.: National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Barber, Benjamin R. (October 1989). "Public Talk and Civic Action: Education for Participation in a Strong Democracy." *Social Education* 53: 355–356, 370.

Boyer, Ernest L. (November 1990). "Civic Education for Responsible Citizens." *Educational Leadership* 48, 3: 4–7.

People for the American Way. (1989). *Democracy's Next Generation: A Study of Youth and Teachers.* Washington, D.C.: People for the American Way.

Resources

The following resource list is a sampling of the many programs attempting to boost civic education:

General Information

ACCESS: A Security Information Service
1730 M St., N.W., Ste. 605
Washington, DC 20036
202/785-6630
Helps concerned citizens find the best resources available—across the political spectrum–on issues like arms control, foreign policy, regional conflicts, and the economic aspects of global security. Offers an inquiry service, speaker referral service, briefing papers, and guides to resources and foundations.

American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Ave.
Washington, DC 20001
202/879-4400
Has an international project on teaching about democracy; publications include a review of textbooks and how they teach democracy.

Council for the Advancement of Citizenship
1724 Massachusetts Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202/857-0580
A consortium of 85 national and regional organizations dedicated to the teaching of citizenship, CAC has an array of clearinghouse services and programs.

National Council for the Social Studies
3501 Newark St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20016
202/966-7840
Provides information on how to join a national network of educators involved in civic education, and information about regional meetings of state councils for the social studies. Contact Dawn Marie Warfle.

Programs/Materials for Schools

American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation
P.O. Box 17407 Dulles Airport
Washington, DC 20041
Provides information on contact persons at newspapers in your region that offer programs on using newspapers for educational purposes. Write Betty Sullivan at the above address.

Center for Civic Education
5146 Douglas Fir Rd.
Calabasas, CA 91302
818/340-9320
Offers a variety of civics-related curriculum materials, as well as an annual national competition on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Close Up Foundation
1235 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202
1-800-356-5136
Provides a variety of publications on current events and other issues, a video/textbook instructional package, and television programming through C-Span. Also offers an annual "Citizen Bee" contest, a civic achievement awards program, and a week-long Washington, D.C., seminar for students and educators.

Constitutional Rights Foundation
601 S. Kingsley Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90005
213/487-5590
Provides technical assistance, teacher training, and curriculum materials in the areas of law-related education, youth leadership, and youth community service programs. Contact Todd Clark or Kathleen Kirby.

Foreign Policy Association
1726 M St., N.W., Ste. 800
Washington, DC 20036
202/293-0046
Publishes the annual Great Decisions *briefing book, which contains 8 current U.S. foreign policy issues ($10.00), plus an activity book containing activities for each topic ($11.00), and a bibliography. For more information, contact Mary Soley.*

National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law
711 G St., S.E.
Washington, DC 20003
202/546-6644
Provides curriculum development, teacher training, and technical assistance to new and established law-related education programs, and produces many publications, including textbooks and a newsletter.

National Issues Forums
100 Commons Dr.
Dayton, OH 45459-2777
Provides materials and study guides for the examination of important public issues by students or adults. Also offers a "Participation in Government" curriculum for schools.

A Presidential Classroom for Young Americans
441 N. Lee St.
Alexandria, VA 22314-2346
1-800-441-6533
Students attending the "Presidential Classroom" in Washington, D.C., learn about government firsthand through an array of seminars with political leaders.

Civic Education

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associate director of Ohio State University's Mershon Center: "There is a deep malaise in citizenship education K–12 right now."

Hardly anyone, if asked the purpose of the common public school, would fail to prominently mention its duty to help prepare students to be participating citizens. Yet some experts believe that far too many schools lose sight of that aim somewhere between reading, math, faculty meetings, and Friday night football games. "On the one hand, citizenship education is up there in neon lights," says James Leming of Southern Illinois University. But the worthy goal of education for effective citizenship often ends up translated into dry lessons on 'How a Bill Becomes Law.' "It's not taught in an engaging, connected way," says Todd Clark, executive director of the Constitutional Rights Foundation. "There's more attention to theory and structure as opposed to practice and action." When schools are ineffective in teaching students the knowledge and values required for civic participation, the consequences are readily apparent. According to statistics and anecdotal evidence, a disquieting number of young adults don't bother to vote, are unprepared to join in public policy debates, or are unwilling to take part in community-building activities that are the central components of civic participation.

For example, the percentage of American 18- to 24-year-olds voting in presidential elections has never topped the 50-percent mark, lags 20 percent behind the rate for those over age 25, and has declined since 18-year-olds were enfranchised in 1972. Further, *Democracy's Next Generation*, the results of a survey completed at PAW's request, suggests that many young adults have an incomplete view of responsible citizenship: they generally equate being a good citizen with being a good person. "To them, citizenship is more about compassion and practice of the 'golden rule' than about voting or taking part in national affairs," the report says.

Many experts are counting on projects such as CIVITAS, a joint venture of CAC and the Center for Civic Education with funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts, to help turn the tide. The project, its proponents say, represents the most comprehensive effort to date to spell out what graduates prepared for a lifetime of meaningful citizenship might look like, and how schools might organize to make developing such students possible. A curriculum framework for grades K–12, CIVITAS places equal importance on civic knowledge and skills, civic participation, and civic virtue. It is expected to be published this spring.

Civic educators also are pleased with the recent passage of the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which authorizes more than $280 million over three years. Among other features, the Act will help to establish part-time community service programs for young adults through schools or community organizations, a focus bound to help raise students' civic knowledge, awareness, and commitment. Experts say such programs are vital to ensuring an informed and participating citizenry. As Buchanan puts it: "We have to reinvest our entire society in the high office of citizen." ■

Ahead with CIVITAS

CIVITAS is expected to be published in March 1991. No price had been set for the framework as this *Curriculum Update* went to press. However, the Council for the Advancement of Citizenship is keeping an advance list of persons interested in CIVITAS. For more information, write CAC, 1724 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

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